News release

Rewarding innovative thinking

19 February 2003

A pioneering service helping the NHS to predict workloads by using weather forecasts swept the board at the Met Office's second annual Innovation Awards last night.

Forecasting the nation's health was the brainchild of former GP Dr William Bird, who has, for the past three years, been part of an eight-strong team at the Met Office, running a pilot scheme involving over 30 hospitals. This winter, the pilot went live across 32 hospitals and, in recognition of its success, was awarded the Most Innovative Scientific Development as well as being chosen the winner of the People's Choice Award by Met Office staff. Heather Bunce, Deputy Director of Operations and Clinical Services Manager at Royal Berkshire and Battle NHS Trust, who presented the team with their first award described the service as "alarmingly accurate".

A scheme to buy second-hand radar from Botswana and Ghana, saving the Met Office money and giving vital funds to the African countries, won the award for Most Innovative Procedure, while a web-based facility to detect volcanic ash clouds, thereby helping forecasters to issue accurate advisories to civil aviation, won the most Innovative Improvement to Operational Systems award.

Jonathan Hearth, Met Office Marketing Director, said: "Innovative and creative thinkers are everywhere in the Met Office, which is why we had such a variety of nominations." In all, there were 28 nominations across five separate categories.

The keynote speaker for the evening was undercover television reporter and presenter of the BBC series Wild Weather Donal MacIntyre, who said: "We like the Met office for all the times they get it right, but we love it when they get it wrong! That, as these awards demonstrate, is a rare event, and last night was a rightful celebration of great work at a great institution."

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